



PTSD Information Brief for Leaders

LTC Drew Kosmowski
Division Surgeon



Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Misconceptions

- “It will never happen to me”
- “It only exists for malingerers trying to get out of duty”
- “It is something that happened after Viet Nam”
- “It’s permanent and untreatable”
- “Guys with PTSD are like Rambo and will go ‘postal’ on you”
- “It only happens to ‘girly-men’”
- “Give me a guy who claims to have PTSD and I’ll beat his ass”



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Caused By: Exposure to a traumatic event in which the person:
 - experienced, witnessed, or was confronted by death or serious injury to self or others **AND**
 - responded with intense fear, helplessness, or horror
- 90% of OIF veterans were exposed to at least 1 Traumatic event (33% of Vietnam vets)
- More events experienced correlates with greater risk of PTSD
- Leaders more at risk for fear of appearing weak and survivor guilt feelings
- Wounded are immediately separated from unit and emotional support system. Decompress without peers

PTSD is the mind's NORMAL response to an ABNORMAL experience



PTSD Symptoms

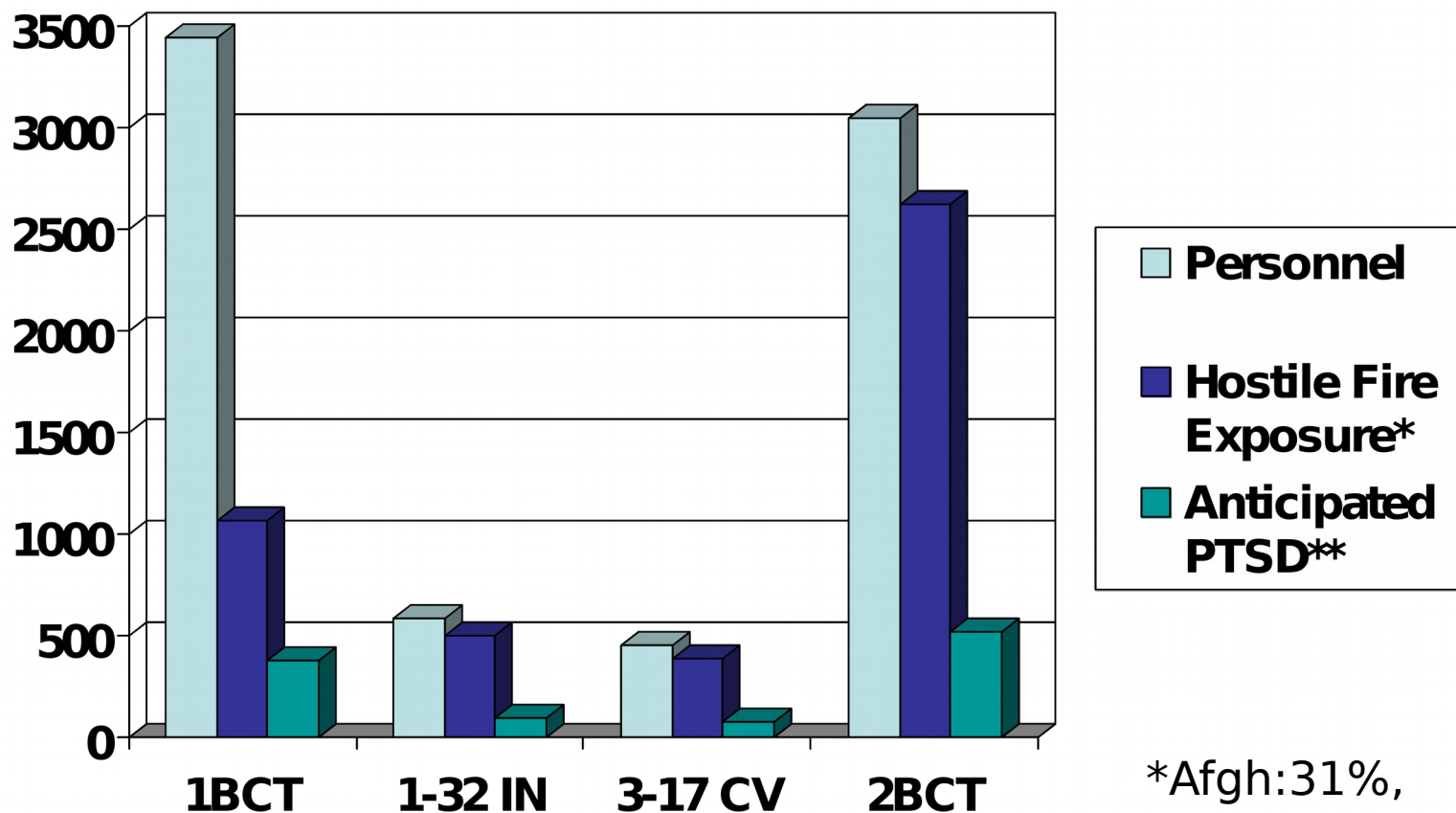
Symptoms Appear in 3 clusters:

- Re-experiencing
 - Recurrent distressing recollections/dreams of event
- Avoidance/Numbing
 - Avoid thoughts, feelings, conversations, activities, places, or people associated with event
 - Inability to recall part of trauma
 - Less interest in activities or other people
- Arousal
 - Difficulty sleeping (insomnia & nightmares)
 - Irritability or outbursts of anger
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Exaggerated startle response

We expect PTSD as much as we expect physically wounded casualties



10th MTN Redeployments



*Afgh:31%,
Iraq:86%

**Afgh:11%,
Iraq:17%



PTSD Warning Signs:



- “SPC X refuses to go to the range”
- “SPC Y comes to formation smelling like a brewery”
- “SGT Z is angry all the time, and takes it out on us”
- “My husband refuses to eat in restaurants or go to the mall”
- “My roommate has not slept well for a month”
- “I feel anxious putting my uniform on in the morning”
- “Joe keeps to himself all the time now”



What Can Command Do?

- Educate all levels of leadership (down to the squad leader) about PTSD
- De-Stigmatize mental health issues among Soldiers through education
- Identify Soldiers with the suspected condition early and refer for treatment
- Allow adequate time for re-integration
- Maintain unit integrity as much as possible to facilitate decompression with peers

WWII vets returned with units after weeks onboard ships to a supportive public.

Vietnam vets returned as individuals by airplane after 365 day tour to



What Treatment is Available? Does it Help?

- Medications
 - Examples: Zoloft, Paxil
 - Not addictive substances
 - Should not effect ability to deploy
 - Should not significantly effect Soldiers' work ability

60% Respond to Medications

- Individual Therapy
- Group Therapy-**Soldiers helping Soldiers**
 - Validation of fears, feelings, performance
 - Gradual Re-exposure
 - Reframing thoughts
 - Stress reduction techniques
- **Only about 1% MEB rate for PTSD**



Failure to Treat

- Misconduct & Separation from Service
 - DWI
 - Bar Fights
 - Domestic Violence–Laughtenberg Amendment
- High Risk Behavior
 - High-Speed Motorcycle/Vehicle Accidents
- Substance Abuse
 - Alcoholism
 - Drug Use/Abuse
- ETS instead of Reenlisting
 - “I just don’t like the Army any more”



What Can First-Line Supervisors Do?

- Pre-Deployment
 - Train Hard with planned Casualty Scenarios in all training events
 - Do AARs-get Soldiers used to talking about tactics and emotions
 - Thorough SRC, Family Care Plans, Financial Plans
- Deployment
 - AAR, Clean Weapons, Personal Hygiene, Chow, Rest
 - Include acknowledgement of emotional events in AAR
 - Look for behavior changes/isolation in subordinates
 - Refer Soldiers to Combat Stress Teams early
 - **P**roximity (in Base Camp), **I**mmediacy, **E**xpectancy of RTD
- Post-Deployment
 - Look for behavior changes/isolation in subordinates
 - Continue to talk to Soldiers about Deployment
 - Refer to Behavioral Health with expectancy of RTD after Treatment



Discussion

